

have laid more stress on spiritual perfection than on dogmatic soundness. Like the Anabaptists, they were the object of the bitterest detestation and calumny on the part of both conformists and nonconformists. They were too advanced by a couple of centuries even for the Puritans, and were therefore monstrous, detestable heretics in the sight not only of a persecuting government and persecuting bishops, but of all ' respectable Christians. Nevertheless, these monstrous heretics, whatever liberties they might take with the letter of the New Testament, seem to have lived in accordance with its spirit. They were in truth, in some respects, the most enlightened persons of their generation, notably in their protest against the persecution of conscience in any shape or form by the civil or ecclesiastical power. It is a truth which only posterity, alas, can as a rule clearly perceive, that progress and power are often in inverse proportion. Power might be enthroned at Westminster or Canterbury ; progress was enthroned in some obscure separatist meeting-house. Even the Puritans of the Cartwright-Calvinist school were by no means the champions of the rights of conscience to which they appealed in defence of their own tenets. They recognised and strenuously taught the right of the magistrate to enforce the laws of the Church as conceived by themselves, and visit dissent from its doctrines and discipline with civil penalties. They disputed the exercise of the royal jurisdiction in things spiritual, they admitted its co-operation in the maintenance of ecclesiastical decrees and sentences. In their more extravagant moods they taught a doctrine of the subordination of the State to the Church that was theoretically as thorough as that of the most bigoted champions of Ultramontaniam, though it is only fair to remember that it was practically modified by a system of representative Church government, under which the cleric element was checked by the laity. They would have persecuted their opponents, whether episcopal, popish, or independent, for their conscientious objections to their ecclesiastical domination. Persecution, it must be remembered, was the accepted doctrine of the age in England, as everywhere else ; toleration the rare intuition of the solitary thinker, the hated sect. The inconsistency of the Puritan outcry against coercion to the Prayer Book, and the Puritan proneness to invoke the law against